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Fairy Tale Film in the Classroom:

Feminist Cultural Pedagogy, Angela Carter, and Neil Jordan's *The Company of Wolves*

Kim Snowden

According to Jack Zipes, readers intuitively know that a narrative is a fairy tale, and the same can be said of fairy tale film (1997, 61).[1] But even though the genre is recognizable regardless of form or medium, audience approaches can be unpredictable. In this chapter, I want to explore a particular audience's reactions and understanding when a specific familiar text is adapted to film. I currently teach a course on the representation of female archetypes in fairy tales. My students and I work with a number of traditional motifs in film and literature, focusing on versions and references in popular culture. My interest in cultural pedagogy from a feminist perspective leads me to ask, what do my students learn from fairy tales and fairy tale films, and how do these texts inform their understanding of socialization relating to sexuality, gender, race, and class differences? In particular, what do fairy tales teach girls and women about femininity, and how do these stories reinforce or subvert broader cultural concepts about gender and sexuality? Marina Warner calls this implicit pedagogy the "suspect whiff of femininity" in fairy tales (1994, xiv). How do contemporary revisions,

1 I assume that readers have a working knowledge of the origins, histories, and definitions of fairy tales. For recent overviews of fairy tales and the challenge of defining them, see Kevin Smith (2007) and Zipes (2007). Like Marina Warner, I focus on tales that center on familial relationships, especially those that deal with marriage, romance, and the notion of a "happy ending" (1994). With her I am interested in their construction of gender.

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including literary and film versions, challenge or reinforce this "suspect whiff" and the feminine ideals it engenders?

This chapter explores these ideas in the light of contemporary feminism and the increasing popularity of postfeminist ideology. In my classroom, I employ the term *cultural pedagogy* to refer to the ways that my students learn about gender, race, class, and other social characteristics through their representations in literature, film, visual art, and popular culture media such as television, advertizing, magazines, and the Internet. Feminist theory, in developing feminist cultural pedagogy, approaches these images with a critical eye. If the gendered values of fairy tales inform and are informed by Euro-North American cultural pedagogy, how do my students respond to them? How do contemporary versions of fairy tales in film complicate these readings, and what challenges do they raise in the classroom?

In answering these questions, I focus primarily on Angela Carter's wolf stories in *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* and the 1984 film adaptation, *The Company of Wolves,* cowritten by Carter and Neil Jordan. I contend that reading Carter's work as antifeminist and reinforcing the patriarchal constraints of the genre is a misunderstanding of her complex intent.[2] Indeed, using the stories and film in a classroom context allows the possibility for a deeper understanding of Carter's feminism and challenges the postfeminist ideology that many students use as a referential framework.[3] Similarly I see Jordan's film as an example of the complexities of Carter's feminist politics.[4]

2 See Joseph Bristow and Trev Lynn Broughton (1997) and Lucie Armitt (1977) for an analysis of Carter's reflections on feminism and an overview of critical debates about reading her work as feminist. Both cite Duncker (1984) as a critic who considers fairy tales to be inherently patriarchal and sees Carter's adaptations as reinforcing this ideology. Cristina Bacchilega challenges Duncker's reading and suggests that Carter avoids a simple rejection of oppressive ideologies that may exist in fairy tales and, instead, acknowledges and confronts patriarchal attitudes by exploring fairy tales' "'several existences' as a genre in history, as well as its stylized configurations of 'woman'" (1997, 52).

3 The term *postfeminism* often refers to a body of analyses and theories that challenge and critique much of the work of feminism's so-called second wave. It is often confused with third-wave feminist politics. I use the term in the sense that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s with the backlash that considers feminism outdated, irrelevant, and unnecessary. See Natasha Pinterics (2001) for a discussion of the problem with the "waves" distinction and a clarification of postfeminism's relationship to recent feminist thinking.

4 I differ with critics such as Sara Martin (2001) and Carole Zucker (2000).

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Fairy Tales in the Classroom and the Possibilities of Feminist Pedagogy

I teach fairy tales, Carter, and Jordan in a course entitled "Women in Literature." A service course at the university—rather than one directly linked to a disciplinary major—it is described as an introductory survey of "literature by and about women." It fulfills the basic literature requirement for any undergraduate degree. Although listed as a women's studies course, it is not required for a major or minor in the department. However, most majors and minors do take it. But as it is one of the few year-long courses and is taught annually, the majority of students are there to fulfill a credit requirement and have no background in either literature or women's studies. Many express their wariness of women's studies and, more so, the idea of feminism. Understandably they fear their peers will mock them for taking a course that can be dismissed as ideology, not academics, but they also resist associating with a philosophy they misunderstand as a polemic.

Of course, some students in every class do not fall into this category and are taking the course *because* it is women's studies. Often proud feminists, these individuals seek to learn about the discipline itself. However, in the six years that I have been teaching this course, those who identify themselves as feminists are in the minority. Indeed, the majority are more comfortable with varying forms of postfeminism. This group includes the students to whom I refer throughout this chapter.[5]

A "postfeminist theater"[6] of covert feminism is part of my teaching because many students accept the postfeminist rhetoric that feminism has met its goals and there is nothing left to fight for. Alternatively, some subscribe to the postfeminist logic that "one might now affirm that one was indeed a feminist, but feel no need to lay claim to this as a significant political identity" (Whelehan 2005, 159). I risk alienating or losing them entirely if I come across, at least initially, as an overt feminist. I need to be aware—as Susan Faludi (1991), Rita Felski (2003), Imelda Whelehan

5 I am not creating a rigid dichotomy between students who identify themselves as feminists and those who don't. Many fall in between, and others do not define themselves in relation to feminism at all.

6 This term comes from Canadian journalist Jennifer Wells (2008). She uses it to refer to powerful public females who, to remain popular, must avoid promoting their feminist agendas overtly. Unlike postfeminism per se, which uses feminist rhetoric to advance a backlash approach, postfeminist theater incorporates postfeminism as a means to advance a feminist agenda.

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(2005), and others have discussed—that postfeminism plays a central role in the backlash against feminism. In this context, feminism as an overall philosophy uses the feminist politics of the second wave as its only possible referent.[7] As Faludi points out, much of this ideology is based on the idea that "the very steps that have elevated women's position have actually led to their downfall" (quoted in Loudermilk 2004, 7). Mass media claims that feminism is dead while simultaneously using it as its "favorite punching bag" (Valenti 2007, 11). Thus, in these students' eyes, to be a feminist is to be outdated, shrill, and "anti-everything" (Ibid., 6).

Yet postfeminism carries out its backlash in feminism's name, and postfeminists "use feminist rhetoric to advance their agenda" (Loudermilk 2004, 7).[8] Similarly many mainstream films using fairy tale motifs and stories and marketed toward a teenaged and early-twenties female audience appear to draw on feminist ideals. For example, *She's All That* (directed by Robert Iscove, 1999), *Ten Things I Hate about You* (directed by Gil Junger, 1999), *A Cinderella Story* (directed by Mark Rosman, 2004), and *Ever After* (directed by Andy Tennant, 1998) play on the theme of a Cinderella-style rags-to-riches story and represent young women at pivotal points in their lives, faced with difficult and challenging choices.[9] Yet these characters' ambitions are invariably derailed when romantic dilemmas supersede them. While

7 Second-wave feminism—often characterized by the catch phrase "the personal is political"—refers to action and awareness centered on women's rights from the 1960s to 1980s. In most of Europe and North America, it evolved alongside student and antiwar protests and the civil rights movement. Largely an activist and consciousness-raising movement, but supported by the development of feminist theory and women's studies departments in universities, it focused on women's sexual freedom, reproductive rights, legalizing birth control and abortion, and equal pay. In addition, it raised awareness about domestic violence, sexual harassment, and violence against women (Code 2000, 209). Recent feminist writing has criticized the second wave for being classist, heterosexist, and racist. Many feminist groups have worked to create more diversity within the larger movement, yet second-wave feminism remains the best known and most often referenced feminist movement. For more on the feminist movement and the specifics of second-wave politics, see Lorraine Code (Ibid.).

8 For more on the backlash against feminism, see Faludi (1991). Kim Loudermilk explores this phenomenon in terms of feminist writing (2004). Similar arguments are found in Whelehan (2005) and Felski (2003).

9 Christy Williams's analysis of *Ever After* in this volume argues that the film—celebrated by critics as a feminist revision of Cinderella—actually presents a narrow version of feminism with few alterations of the original's patriarchal vision. Its postfeminist position doesn't address the realities of contemporary feminism or its place in the lives of its intended audience of girls and women. Rather than challenging fear of feminism, *Ever After* placates it.

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these films may have active, engaged, and smart heroines, they ultimately prioritize romantic, heterosexual love and standard norms of beauty as the most prized achievements their characters—and by implication their audiences—can hope for. These are the fairy tale visions that my students are most familiar and, seemingly, most comfortable with. They accept the films' representation of girls and young women as having an endless range of wonderful options from which they may freely choose. They may be able to identify the gender, class, race, and other limitations of these ideas, but they still seem to accept them as the norm.

It is within this context that I teach Angela Carter's work and *The Company of Wolves* in a section called "Little Red Riding Hood and Wolves." We explore the archetypes and representations of gender in various versions of "Little Red Riding Hood" (ATU 333), most commonly those of Charles Perrault ([1697] 1961) and Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm ([1812] 1981), compared to Carter's three wolf stories and the film. In six years of teaching these texts to undergraduates, I have yet to encounter a student who has seen *The Company of Wolves* before viewing it in my classroom. Usually all have seen the films I've already mentioned as well as most Disney fairy tale films. How, then, does Angela Carter fit into their cultural pedagogy?

Fairy Tales as Femininity: The Possibilities of Fairy Tales as Feminist Pedagogy

At the beginning of every semester, I ask my students to fill out a questionnaire about why they chose to take my class. Inevitably at least half say that they are excited about the chance to read and study fairy tales. I teach literary fairy tales and written versions of traditional oral stories in the context of their form and function as written texts but also as part of cultural pedagogy. We explore contemporary and feminist versions and examine the use of archetypes and the representations of women, female desire, and agency.

Fairy tales are part of most of my students' reading background but also their viewing history. Many know these texts through the collections of the Brothers Grimm or the literary fairy tales of Hans Christian Andersen. Some are also familiar with other collections and writers. But most know fairy tale through film, especially the Disney versions. For this generation of students, Disney is synonymous with fairy tales. Unfortunately, this equation not only limits their understanding of the genre's rich and diverse history but also establishes a specific type: a formula that they come to

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expect and desire. As Jack Zipes points out, "The reception of folk and fairy tales in the Western world (and to a great extent throughout the world) has been heavily influenced by the Walt Disney industry and other similar corporations so that most people have preconceived notions of what a fairy tale is and should be" (1979, 105). The Disney model also instills a conventional and stereotyped idea of the way gender is constructed in these texts. Even students who can identify and critique social constructions of gender in other genres and media resist judging fairy tales: they are untouchable.

The Disney Studios began mass-market commodification of fairy tales during the 1930s. The company, always at the forefront of animation, prioritized new technological advances over "the narrative depths of the fairy tale" (Zipes 1997, 94). Disney standardized the formula for fairy tale films by entrenching a recognizable and pervasive brand (Ibid., 92). Features that appear in every film include music and songs that reveal the characters' inner thoughts; the sequential plot that relies on a woman/girl being rescued by a worthy man; the inevitable resolution based on heterosexual marriage or betrothal; and the secondary characters, usually funny animals, who inform and elaborate this primary narrative and guarantee its outcome (Ibid., 95).[10]

Many students think that this formula has evolved over time. They see the gender depictions in earlier works as laughably dated, but they contend that more recent Disney films can be read as feminist. Yet, as Zipes argues, many new developments actually result from advances in animation rather than a change in the formula. The films may appear to be more in step with current mores and ideology, but what lies beneath is still the "well-ordered, clean world in which evil is always recognizable and good takes the form of a male hero who is as dependable as the phallic principles that originally stamped the medium of animation at the beginning of the twentieth century" (Zipes 1997, 92). Now, as then—as Linda Pershing and Lisa Gablehouse indicate in their discussion of *Enchanted* (directed by Kevin Lima, 2007) in this volume (see also Cristina Bacchilega and John Rieder's article in this anthology)—Disney films sell the ideology they have always espoused. Despite the inclusion of strong women, female warriors, liberal feminists, and powerful, magical girls, Disney and most mainstream contemporary fairy tale films ultimately send the same postfeminist message: women can

10 Zipes explores this formula up to *The Lion King* (directed by Roger Allers and Rob Minkoff, 1994), but it equally applies to the films that followed.

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be all of these things as long as they ultimately conform to social norms of heterosexual marriage.[11]

Audiences are familiar with the structures and expectations of fairy tales; those things are what makes them so readily recognizable. "The existing canon indicates a central fact about the study of fairy tales: we cannot help but know what a fairy tale is before we know what a fairy tale is" (Martin 2006, 15). Ann Martin's idea of "intuitive cultural knowledge" (Ibid.) is evident when my students discuss different versions of fairy tales they recall from their childhoods, which encompass diverse cultural and literary backgrounds. As Marina Warner points out, much of this intuition is linked to very limited knowledge of gender roles, domesticity, female sexuality, female heroism, and femininity (1994, xiv). Further, these narrow structures are reproduced and rewritten into Disney films and contemporary popular culture and media. So what does it mean when students intuitively understand a cultural text that is created within such narrow and oppressive gender frameworks?

Warner suggests that the complexities of fairy tales and the richness of their histories have been erased by companies like Disney and its affiliates, who have "naturalized" specific versions of fairy tales through images and texts "with certain prejudices and values deeply instilled" (1994, 416). She says that

> the misogyny present in many fairy stories—the wicked stepmothers, bad fairies, ogresses, spoiled princesses, ugly sisters and so forth—has lost its connections to the particular web of tensions in which women were enmeshed and come to look dangerously like the way things are. The historical context of the stories has been sheared away, and figures like the wicked stepmother have grown into archetypes of the human psyche, hallowed inevitable symbols, while figures like the Beast bridegroom have been granted ever more positive status. . . . The danger of women has become more and more part of the story, and correspondingly, the danger of men has receded. (Ibid., 417)

This naturalization of a cultural approach is precisely why I teach fairy tales and focus specifically on ones with plots that center on marriage and

11 Exceptions to the pattern of postfeminism defining fairy tale film discussed in this volume include the independent production of *The Juniper Tree* by feminist director Nietzchka Keene (1990; see Pauline Greenhill and Anne Brydon's chapter); Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006; see Cristina Bacchilega and John Rieder's article and Tracie Lukasiewicz's chapter), *Eyes Wide Shut* (directed by Stanley Kubrick, 1999; see Sidney Eve Matrix's analysis), and the works of Tim Burton (see Brian Ray's article).

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family. Indeed, these are the narratives usually reproduced in the most popular contemporary fairy tale films. Fairy tales offer my students a way to look at the realities and complexities of gendered experience through texts that appeal to their sense of nostalgia for wonder and enchantment: students recognize them as part of their cultural pedagogy. But the contemporary versions that are also part of their learning are steeped in sexism that teaches them, as Warner says, that this cultural patterning is "the way things are" (Ibid., 417).

This preconception often creates a dilemma in the classroom. Many students voice their frustration at not knowing what they are supposed to feel about certain stories. For example, they often cite Belle in Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* (directed by Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise, 1991) as a character who is special because she appears to be Disney's first and strongest feminist character. However, they can also read the film in the light of critics such as Zipes and Warner, who identify Belle as constructed within limited feminist frameworks that may reinforce sexist constructions of gender. So, they ask, should this critique prevent them from enjoying the film or liking Belle's character? Is Belle feminist or not? Is Disney antifeminist? Are they antifeminist if they enjoy the film? Much of the reason for these concerns relies on feminism being understood as dichotomous and one dimensional. If, as I contend, there is more than one way to define feminism—both for the students and the characters they study—these questions become less divisive and the answers more complex and compelling.

The students' questions illustrate one of the dangers of postfeminism: feminism's complexities, diversities, and realities get lost in ideology. If students must distance themselves from a feminism that is now perceived as irrelevant, many fear that reading fairy tales within feminist frameworks must inevitably result in the conclusion that all fairy tales are bad and sexist and should therefore be avoided. Instead, I try to lead my classes toward the realization that there are multiple ways to understand feminism and reading fairy tales from feminist perspectives does not mean that they cannot enjoy them. Indeed, such readings can actually enhance students' appreciation of the films.

However, I also want to draw students' attention to the ways that many contemporary fairy tales and fairy tale films reinforce narrow frameworks and socially constructed ideas about femininity, sexuality, and beauty, as well as suggest that heterosexual marriage should be young women's sole desired goal. As Warner says, these representations undermine both the inherent

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complexities and any possible feminist readings of traditional fairy tales (1994, 416). Instead, such concepts reinforce oppressive ideals of gender.

So how can students in a feminist classroom read Carter? Can her work become part of the same cultural pedagogy that most contemporary fairy tale depictions in film and television currently occupy, or does her work offer possibilities for feminist interpretation? My observations suggest that Carter occupies a place that is almost too feminist for students. They are more comfortable with seeing her work reinforce sexist stereotypes than with contemplating the possibility that she challenges both narrow feminist and antifeminist constructions of femininity and female sexual desire.[12] On the other hand, they are quick to embrace other class material—such as the film *Ginger Snaps* (directed by John Fawcett, 2000) and the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (created by Joss Whedon, 1997–2003)—as feminist examples of the way archetypes and images can be rewritten and retold in contemporary contexts. But even here, their analysis too often falls victim to postfeminist ideology.

I suggest that students are drawn to these images precisely because they erase any discomfort with feminism by reasserting the characters' relationship to the feminine in recognizable ways. Buffy uses her physicality for purposes other than simply to attract cute boys. However, she does so within conventional accepted frameworks of femininity. Buffy never fails to remind the audience that though she is the slayer, violently and mercilessly dispatching vampires and demons, she is also desirable to boys and constantly makes references to things traditionally associated with the feminine, such as shopping, clothing, and shoes; these are as much a part of her daily routine as saving the world. She stands up to male, adult authority figures' and vampires' aggression without fear but also without losing one iota of her conventional attractiveness—to boys and her audience.

Ginger, on the other hand, personally critiques attempts to restrict and define her sexuality, but she is apparently punished for it. She is initially defined against traditional conventions of beauty and, therefore, is an outcast in her high school. During her transformation, she begins to embrace a feminine sexuality that is appealing to boys and problematically

12 As discussed by Kimberly J. Lau, Carter's work exemplifies "an alternative erotics located in the very infidelities to the usual, enchained erotic" (2008, 77). She argues that "women writers seem to have found in fairy tales a means of rearticulating women's sexual agency by drawing attention to their/our positioning within a culture that fetishizes young girls as objects of sexual desire" (Ibid., 79).

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associated with the animal/monster she becomes. The horrendous alteration of her body and mind eliminates any possibility of individual action or personal choice. Her werewolf nature entirely consumes her. In contrast, Carter's constructions of femininity and sexuality are both recognizable and unrecognizable to my students because she refuses to conform to one static notion or dichotomy of either femininity or feminism. Thus, her work is crucial to my class's analysis of gender and archetypes in fairy tales.

Ann Martin invokes "popular metaphors: 'a wicked stepmother'; 'a Cinderella story'; 'a fairy tale ending'" (2006, 15). The latter centrally relates to many of the texts that we address in class that end in marriage or betrothal. They assert that marriage is every young girl's happily-ever-after. That this univocal conclusion has become the touchstone of most contemporary fairy tale films is the reason I choose to teach *other* fairy tales that also have young women's comings-of-age, marriage, and family as their central plots but resolve them in different ways. For example, stories in Carter's *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* employ similar plots, but they challenge the equation that happily-ever-after equals heterosexual marriage.

In an essay about the influence fairy tales had on her writing, Midori Snyder discusses heroines who were active, courageous, and smart:

> They were certainly a far cry from the "waiting-to-be-awakened" girls or the girls expected to be fitted with a shoe, a prince, and a future all at the same time. Yet even in their plucky natures and heroic tales, there was still something that troubled me. Perhaps it was the assumption of happily-ever-after, or at least the seeming surrender of all that reckless adventure. Their rites of passage completed, the journey to find a husband over, there was an expectation that these young women would settle once again into neatly defined roles and an untroubled routine. (2002, 325)

Carter's work similarly allows students to deconstruct the way the apparently neatly defined roles work in traditional tales but also opens up a discussion about the complexities of feminism and postfeminism and breaks down dichotomies and stereotypes concerning female sexuality, agency, and women's happily-ever-afters.

Angela Carter in the Classroom

Carter's stories and Jordan's film serve multiple and diverse ends in the classroom. First, I want my students to be aware of Carter's dialogue with

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traditional versions of "Little Red Riding Hood." This interaction occurs in the film—collaboratively written by Carter and Jordan—through the many references to Carter's story and Perrault's version of the fairy tale.[13] The film and story also both refer to oral storytelling traditions, particularly passing down stories through generations of women. In the film, the young girl Rosaleen (Sarah Patterson) is portrayed as a heroine. Curious, self-aware, fearless, she refuses to deny her emerging sexuality or allow herself to become part of a traditional narrative of punishment or victimization, thereby encouraging the viewer to do the same. Though the film and story endings differ, the former still references Carter's larger body of work and her feminist politics.

Second, both Carter and Jordan disrupt the traditional rites of passage for young women often found in family- and marriage-centered fairy tales. They do so through Rosaleen's relationships with her male peers and the huntsman/werewolf (Micha Bergese) and also her relationship with her mother (Tusse Silberg). Rosaleen unconventionally rejects traditional courtship rituals and, instead, acts on her own desires with the hunter/werewolf. And, at the same time, she challenges the assumption that her rite of passage requires severing the bond between mother and daughter. The result is a narrative that allows Rosaleen to act on her own choices with her mother's blessing.

Third, through the use of a frame story that has a contemporary version of Rosaleen dreaming of herself as Little Red Riding Hood and her transformation into a wolf, Jordan challenges the traditional negative association of women's sexuality with beastliness and, in doing so, resists the possibility of the more traditional happy ending that would have Rosaleen rescued and set on the proper path to heterosexual marriage.

Postfeminism affects the way some of my students view *The Company of Wolves.* Because they are more at ease with contemporary depictions of fairy tale motifs in film and television than with Carter, their reactions vary. They may see it as a horror film, a comedy, and/or an adaptation that simply doesn't make sense. Indeed, there are many seemingly nonsensical aspects to Jordan's film such as giant dollhouses, oversized toys, cars out of place

13 Perrault's version of "Little Red Riding Hood" is just one of many intertextual references in Jordan's film. I mention it here because it is the version on which Carter's "The Company of Wolves" is based.

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and time, and animals where they don't belong.[14] Carter commented that—unlike the story—the film remains curiously open ended (Martin 2001, 19). While the adaptation was a collaborative process, it was also an interpretive one. The film can be seen as a dialogue with Carter's three Red Riding Hood/wolf stories ("The Werewolf," "The Company of Wolves," and "Wolf-Alice") but also a reference to Carter's own dialogue with Perrault.

Sara Martin considers these overlapping discourses as one aspect of the film's failure. She argues that *The Company of Wolves* has no unified centre and no fundamental meaning because Jordan attempts to locate his work not only in Carter's story but also in other werewolf and horror films of the 1980s: "The problem . . . is that Jordan attempts to hold different conversations at the same time that do not quite deal with the same subject: his absorbing dialogue with Carter—a consequence of her own dialogue with Perrault—leaves little room for the innovating, daring mixture of the tale's wolf with the horror film's werewolf. In the end, the fairy tale dominates the horror film, a victory that undermines the role of the immature heroine" (2001, 30).

Martin contends that Jordan fails to allow Rosaleen to embrace completely the role of fairy tale or horror-film heroine or any subversive combination. The uncertainty of Rosaleen's location is precisely what makes the film problematic for students to accept in a feminist context because it does not clearly align itself with a feminism that they recognize. If my students and I read *The Company of Wolves* as a film that incorporates many different dialogues among genres and ideologies (traditional fairy tales, fairy tale films, adaptations, horror films, feminism, Carter, Perrault), we are forced to face our discomfort with the fact that there may not be one simple way to understand Rosaleen or her place in the world of feminist fairy tales, or one simple way to understand Carter's feminism and representation of the feminine. As the characters in *The Company of Wolves* repeat, "Seeing is believing," but in the classroom, students are often unable to believe what they see because—refusing to remain static—it challenges their preconceptions of both fairy tales and feminism.

14 Of course, such features are very much part of both traditional and literary fairy tales as well as fairy tale film. Consider, for example, the helicopter that brings the Lilac Fairy and the king to Donkeyskin's wedding in *Peau d'âne* (directed by Jacques Demy, 1970), or the disembodied hands that serve food to Belle in *La Belle et la bête* (directed by Jean Cocteau, 1946).

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Carter's dialogue with the history of traditional fairy tales informs an understanding of its feminist underpinnings. She engages with the way these narratives explore the role of women in patriarchal contexts but also with examples that specifically detail relationships between adults. Carter says that she is interested in fairy tales that express the "latent content of stories" that are often about cannibalism, incest, bestiality, sexual desire, and female sexuality (Day 1998, 133). Aidan Day describes Carter's fairy tales as informed by psychoanalysis but "better described as materialist, rationalist 'fables of the politics of experience.' Specifically, of course, it is the gender politics and the intimately related class politics of experience that they are preoccupied with" (Ibid., 134).

However, Carter's handling of gender—along with her fascination with "female sexuality through images of passivity, violence, bestiality and sadomasochism"—often raises questions (Armitt 1997, 88). As Lucie Armitt points out, Carter has been criticized by feminist literary critics such as Patricia Duncker (1984) for her treatment of the feminine, domesticity, and other symbols that are considered part of the patriarchal content of fairy tales. The result is that "patriarchy and its constraints can be made to appear inescapable" (1997, 88). However, Armitt also rightly insists that Carter's work should not be dismissed as antifeminist. Instead, she suggests that Carter's work deals with the complexities of female desire and sexuality within patriarchal contexts (Ibid.).[15]

Hermione Lee agrees that Carter should be identified with "a feminism which employs anti-patriarchal satire, Gothic fantasy, and the subversive rewriting of familiar myths and stories, to embody alternative, utopian recommendations for human behavior," but she should never be considered "politically correct" (1994, 310, 311). Carter's dialogue with feminist discourse draws attention to the fact that feminism cannot be seen as a polemic or from a unitary perspective (Day 1998, 149-50). Her work, then, is a perfect source for *creating* feminist cultural pedagogy: teaching students feminism's heterogeneous forms. Rather than detracting from them, Jordan's film reflects these complexities. What others read as his inability to align the film successfully with one genre, my students and I interpret as an example of the enigmatic nature of Carter's work. The questions raised

15 Armitt deals extensively with the elements of Carter's fiction that many critics have called misogynist, such as "the enclosing effects of domesticity" and the use of the gothic in her work (1997, 88).

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in my classroom about the film ultimately lead to eye-opening discussions about fairy tale film and fairy tales as cultural pedagogy.

Carter contributes to feminist cultural pedagogy through her dialogue with traditional fairy tales. Her short story, "The Company of Wolves," references Perrault's version of "Little Red Riding Hood," and her narrative reflects both the changes that he made from the original oral tale and her criticisms of them. For example, as Zipes points out, the French oral tale on which Perrault based his 1697 version presents the young girl as a capable, brave, and smart person who escapes from the wolf and "learns to cope with the world around her" (1986, 229). The original tale ends with the young girl returning home, an act that also secures her safety from the wolf because he cannot enter her house (Ibid.).[16] Zipes indicates that Perrault (and subsequently the Grimm brothers) transformed the tale into "a narrative about rape in which the heroine is obliged to bear the responsibility for sexual violation" (Ibid., 227). These narratives strip the character of Little Red Riding Hood of any agency in her sexual desires or ability to make choices free from blame or victimization. Carter's heroine challenges Perrault's construction of Little Red Riding Hood's sexuality as deviant and rape as the inevitable and deserved outcome, one that is problematically connected to her coming-of-age.

Zipes suggests that Perrault's addition of the little girl's red cape/hat not only symbolizes her coming of age with menstruation but also taints her and marks her as sinful "since red, like the scarlet letter A, recalls the devil and heresy" (1986, 230). He and other critics have paralleled the devouring of Red Riding Hood to a sexual assault. Compared to the one in the original oral story, Perrault's heroine is naïve and spoiled and thus deserves her fate. She is made to be responsible for—and even to desire—her own rape (Ibid.).[17] Carter rejects this misogynist and essential connection of blood/red/sex/violence that is supposed to shame Little Red Riding Hood. The writer reclaims her from her status as a "female object of male desire" (Zipes 1986, 229). Carter uses the red shawl to address the reality of the young girl's sexual awakening through her awareness of her body and insistence on talking about blood and menstruation as a natural process. In the story, the young girl refers to her scarlet shawl as "the color of her menses" (Carter

16 The original French tale can be found in Zipes (1986, 228–29).

17 For a more in-depth analysis of the literary development of sexual violence in "Little Red Riding Hood," see Zipes (1983, 1986). For an exploration of the use of the same narrative to explore pedophilia in films, see Greenhill and Kohm (2009).

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1979, 117), and in the film, Rosaleen is quick to mention that her shawl is red—like blood.

Jordan also disrupts traditional rites of passage for fairy tale heroines, especially those in tales that connect coming of age to the pursuit of marriage. Rosaleen's parents tease her about the local village boy who wants to court her. They clearly assume that she will marry one of the few village boys her age. At the same time, Granny (Angela Lansbury) prepares Rosaleen for womanhood by regaling her with stories and folktales about women and werewolves, each concluding with the warning that all men are beasts and women are responsible for inciting their beastliness/lust and must bear the consequences. These stories also reinforce the expectation that Rosaleen will soon marry and, at the same time, serve as a reminder of the narrow, gendered roles and constructions of sexuality to which Granny subscribes.

However, Rosaleen rejects these traditional roles and stories. The narrative that she hears from Granny but retells to her mother and the werewolf invokes women who stray from the path and are comfortable in the forest, who are kin to the wolves, recognizing themselves in these animals' otherness. By questioning the passivity of the women in Granny's stories—at one point, referring to her sister who was killed by wolves, she asks, "Why couldn't she save herself?"—Rosaleen weaves her own versions of fairy tales and assumes the role of the female storyteller. Cristina Bacchilega says that the film reinterprets "blood-line as narrative tradition" and Rosaleen strengthens the "primarily female genealogy" through becoming a storyteller (1997, 67). She does so without losing the pleasure of telling a story but shifts her narratives away from Granny's moralizing tone.

Of course, Rosaleen does not reject the rituals of courtship completely. In fact, her curiosity leads her to test them with a walk in the woods with a village boy, even experimenting with a kiss. However, she easily tires of him and decides that she is meant for something or someone better. In making this choice and assuming that she can and will move beyond the narrow expectations of the village, Rosaleen again shifts the traditional narrative. What is important for my teaching is that Rosaleen does not reject the idea of marriage; instead, she recognizes other options. Traditional rites of passage do not define her coming of age; she defines it.

This narrative shift is also evident in Rosaleen's relationship with her mother. In Carter's "The Bloody Chamber," the narrator says that when she herself married she "ceased to be her [mother's] child in becoming his wife" (1979, 7). This comment suggests that a daughter can never go back;

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the transition from childhood to adulthood relies on rejecting the parents, especially the mother, signaling women as objects of exchange between men and part of the transmission of property in a patriarchal economy.[18] In *The Company of Wolves,* in contrast, Rosaleen finds a baby doll in a bird's nest that she gives to her mother, thus making children or their avatars subject to women's exchange. This moment occurs after Rosaleen has rejected the village boy but before she embarks on her journey through the forest to Granny's house. Viewers recognize this travel as part of the traditional "Little Red Riding Hood" narrative and associate it with her transition from child to young woman.

When Rosaleen gives the doll to her mother, she relinquishes childhood but also leaves part of herself with her mother. Her act allows the possibility of her return and also continues and strengthens not only the bond between women but also the links in the female familial line. Enacting a connection with the mother is also related to the original French tale that concludes with the young girl's escape and return home. In this version, the wolf chases her but is forced to admit defeat once she is safely inside her home and thus returned to her mother's care. In many subsequent versions, however, Little Red Riding Hood is either killed or rescued. It is neither her agency nor her return home that keeps her safe. Instead, the patriarchal male hunter saves her, and sometimes also her grandmother, reinforcing his power and their weakness.[19] In *The Company of Wolves,* Rosaleen is also saved by her mother, who is able to recognize that her daughter has transformed into a wolf.

"She Knew She Was Nobody's Meat": Rosaleen's Sexuality

The young girl's "seduction" of the wolf/werewolf in the story and Rosaleen's subsequent metamorphosis into a wolf at the end of Jordan's film present troubling dilemmas to students. The relationship of female sexuality to the beastly and, further, the possibility of sex with the beast become problematic for students because they immediately associate these ideas with patriarchal constructions of female sexuality and believe Carter is perpetuating damaging images. Certainly female sexuality has long been connected with danger

18 Gayle Rubin (1975) and Luce Irigaray (1985) have most famously discussed the exchange of women.

19 Carter explores the relationship between mothers and daughters and uses the return to the mother in many of her fairy tales, most notably "The Bloody Chamber," where the mother rescues her daughter from Bluebeard (1979, 40).

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and represented as uncontrollable and wild, something animalistic. But this association is precisely Carter's point. Aidan Day suggests that Carter uses animals in her stories to represent a libido and desire that are common to both men and women and fall outside traditional constructions of both male and female sexuality: "She uses the image of animals to signify a libido that has been culturally repressed in some women and which needs recognizing and articulating in order that they may define autonomous subject positions for themselves. A recognition of the materiality of the flesh is not the same as attributing particular essences to the flesh" (Day 1998, 147), as Carter's comment that "she was nobody's meat" underlines (1979, 18).

In the film, this signification is particularly evident in the way that seeing functions. *The Company of Wolves* effectively subverts the male perspective. According to Laura Mulvey, in classic Hollywood films, "pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive female" where women are "simultaneously looked at and displayed," connoting a "to-be-looked-at-ness" but inability to return the look (1975, 11). Mulvey's perspective has been criticized for assuming a male viewer and precluding the possibilities of female spectatorship and pleasure in viewing, but her ideas have inspired not only feminist film critics but also filmmakers.[20] In *The Company of Wolves,* Rosaleen refuses to be objectified by the werewolf or sacrifice her own desires.

First, when she encounters the hunter in the forest, she plays along with his seduction, enjoying the game, exploring her feelings with a mixture of naïvety and boldness that keeps the viewer guessing about her knowledge and experience. That Rosaleen is driven by her desires at the possible expense of her safety is disconcerting. But at the same time, she appears to be aware of her role in this "rustic seduction" (Carter 1979, 115) and gets pleasure from it. When she arrives at Granny's house and is confronted by the werewolf, she seems, again, aware of the danger. Yet she sees it as a challenge, dismissing her fear as useless. She takes control, asks him questions, and takes off her own clothes. Rosaleen is aware of her surroundings and means of escape but is also obviously drawn to the werewolf by desire and curiosity. She understands the power of her sexuality, not as an object of male desire but something pleasurable to her. Rosaleen does not use her sexuality to tame the beast or lull him into a false sense of security and escape. Instead,

20 Other essays in this volume address feminist film theory and seeing in more detail. See, for example, Pauline Greenhill and Anne Brydon's chapter on *The Juniper Tree* and Sidney Eve Matrix's discussion of ways of seeing in *Eyes Wide Shut.*

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she discovers the pleasure in controlling her own desires and, in doing so, frees herself from male dominance (see Lau 2008, 81–88).

Catherine Lappas says that the film provides "an interesting moment for female spectatorship—a pleasurable moment in which woman acts as a distinct subject with agency and identity" (1996, 116). In the classroom, students can initially interpret Rosaleen's seduction of the werewolf as a problematic use of female sexuality to tame the beast. But they then explore this scene as a possible subversion of the woman-as-object/man-as-viewer dichotomy. Rosaleen's pleasure and her somewhat naïve and experimental approach to sexual agency and autonomy allow an interpretation of desire that falls outside the male perspective. Rosaleen controls her own body and safety. The film, then, subverts the victimization and voyeurism that Zipes says are inherent in the original tales of "Little Red Riding Hood" by allowing Rosaleen to engage actively with her desire as part of her self-identification and coming-of-age.

The ending to the film that changes Rosaleen into a wolf also troubles many in my classroom. Similarly, some critics read the conclusion as Jordan punishing Rosaleen for her active desire by transforming her into a beast. But viewers must recognize that the film is framed by a contemporary Rosaleen dreaming. The dream and real worlds collapse onto one another at the end as the dream-world wolves break through the boundary and attack Rosaleen. Sara Martin believes that Jordan's ending—supposedly written on his own and not endorsed by Carter—undermines Carter's message of female liberation. She suggests that both the metamorphosis into a wolf and the possible killing of the dreaming girl can be read as "Rosaleen's fall into monstrosity" and her subsequent punishment for her active part in her fall (Martin 2001, 20).[21] But my classes often conclude that this collapsing of frames offers the potential for a reading that reclaims female subjectivity and agency by embracing the Other within the self.[22] Specifically the abject Other survives, and Rosaleen must literally confront it.

21 Bacchilega agrees that the ending of the film "undoes" much of the feminist potential by punishing Rosaleen (1997, 69).

22 In feminist terminology, the association of women with the Other refers to their oppression in patriarchal societies. "Women, under oppression, are forced to deny their freedom and accommodate themselves to a life of immanence as the Other, while men claim subjectivity for themselves alone. Man is the positive, the norm, the universal; while woman is the negative, a deviation, a distortion" (Code 2000, 374).

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Gina Wisker suggests that the emphasis on the self/other demonstrates Carter's fascination with horror writing and the gothic. Carter's work, as part of the history of the gothic in literature, explores the repressed and rejected Other in terms of gender (1997, 117). Wisker reads Carter's writing in relationship to abjection and dealing with opposites, such as repulsion and desire, but never privileging one over the other. Carter "shows us that . . . we ourselves produce what we most fear" (Ibid., 126).[23]

In *The Company of Wolves,* Rosaleen is the Other to her dreaming self. The dream Rosaleen fears girls like her sister, ones like her dreaming self—the passive, sleeping beauties. At the film's conclusion, Rosaleen empathizes with the werewolf, allowing him to accept the Other as part of himself. In the process, she transforms into a wolf, thereby fully embracing the Other within. The passive, sleeping heroine (significantly her bedroom is located in a decaying mansion) perhaps awakens and is possibly devoured and incorporated by her powerful, sexual, desiring Other, allowing a new understanding of femininity, sexuality, and power. And this is Julia Kristeva's point, as described by Wisker: "By recognizing the Other and the abject as part of ourselves, we can . . . overcome the need to find victims, scapegoats, enemies" (Ibid., 126).

Saving Ourselves

In an episode of the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* called "Fear, Itself," Buffy and her friends prepare to go to a Halloween party at a fraternity house on campus.[24] She is dressed as Little Red Riding Hood, but when asked what she has in her basket, she replies, "Weapons." The characters refer to a previous episode where a magic spell gone awry turned all of them into their costumes. In that installment**,** Buffy, dressed in a ball gown/princess outfit, instantly became helpless and afraid, unable to defend herself, and dependent on men for rescue. In "Fear, Itself," Buffy chooses to be Red because she doesn't want to be helpless again, and she correctly defines that character as a strong, independent, self-reliant woman. Even more significant is the fact that in the same episode, Buffy's mother adjusts the costume to fit her, remembering how she wore it as a little girl.

23 Abjection, in Kristevan terms, refers to what the body must reject to create a recognizable autonomous subject. The abject is "ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable" (Kristeva 1982, 2).

24 The episode originally aired in 1999: season four, episode four.

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In altering the outfit for grown-up Buffy, she also changes the narrative to allow Little Red Riding Hood to evolve as a female symbol and character. While the character stands for Buffy's childhood nostalgia and the meaning of fairy tales to little girls, she is also a powerful reminder that Buffy's understanding of Little Red Riding Hood strays far from the submissive and naïve victim of Perrault's story.

This episode links Rosaleen to the adult Buffy. Buffy is a safe feminist choice for my students because her association with the feminine allows them to access her power without undermining their relationship to the heterofemininity they fear they must sacrifice to accept feminism. Irene Karras calls Buffy a "girlie feminist": she uses her femininity as a source of power, rather than embodying the typical traits of a masculine hero (2002, para. 14). Karras argues that Buffy is a successful feminist character because she embraces both the feminine and her female sexuality but does so outside of patriarchal understandings of these qualities. Like Rosaleen, Buffy's rite of passage to become a slayer happens at the onset of menstruation—her burgeoning sexuality is equated with her power. As she grows up and becomes more aware of herself as a sexual, desiring woman, she also begins to own her power, and we understand her as a traditional object of the male gaze who not only looks back but is not punished—indeed, she is rewarded—for doing so. Buffy's gaze—her percipient eye for the vampire and demon—is what makes her the successful slayer she is.

My hope, then, is to create a dialogue in the classroom between Buffy—and other characters like her—and Rosaleen so that students can understand them all as part of a feminist cultural pedagogy. Karras says that Buffy represents third wave feminists' struggle "to define their femaleness in a world where the naming is often done by the media and pop culture, where the choice for young women is to be either a babe or a bitch . . . and third wave activism builds on the second wave by focusing on the relationship of texts to one another and to the world" (2002, para. 7). Postfeminist ideology wants my students to believe that they must choose between being a babe or a feminist bitch. Many young women embrace postfeminist ideology precisely because they see feminism as devaluing the feminine (and, to some degree, the masculine). Unlike Carol Clover's "final girl"—the lone survivor at the end of the horror film whose heroic power is undermined by her status as victim of the male perspective and her association with masculine traits (as indicated by her androgynous name and figure), Rosaleen and Buffy

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survive without sacrificing their femininity.[25] This is where their potential for subversion lies. My students have the ability to "unlearn" and "relearn"—to ask, as Rosaleen herself does, "Why couldn't she save herself?"

25 Irene Karras, Sara Martin, and Catherine Lappas all discuss Carol Clover's concept of the "final girl" (1992), an androgynous and androgynously named figure in slasher films who "endures a relentless persecution that claims the lives of all those around her and that finally leads to her horrific confrontation with death, embodied by the monster, which she survives whether she is rescued by others or rescues herself" (Martin 2001, 18–19). Clover sees the final girl's victory as undermined by her association with masculinity: "her inevitable sexual reluctance, her apartness from other girls, sometimes her name . . . her unfemininity is signaled clearly by her exercise of the 'active, investigating gaze' normally reserved for males and hideously punished in females" (Clover 1992, 83). Martin counters that Clover's insistence on the final girl's victimization as key to male scopophilic pleasure does not allow for female spectatorship and undermines her role as a survivor and heroine.

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